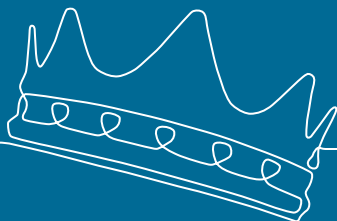


COVENANT^{EFC}

AUGUST
2022
DEVOTIONAL
JOURNAL

*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing,
give thanks in all circumstances; for this is
the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18



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1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18

MEMORY VERSES

2022

From 1 & 2 Thessalonians

◆ January

And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit

– 1 Thessalonians 1:6 (ESV)

◆ February

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality

– 1 Thessalonians 4:3 (ESV)

◆ March

That each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honour – 1 Thessalonians 4:4 (ESV)

◆ April

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep.

– 1 Thessalonians 4:14 (ESV)

◆ May

For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. – 1 Thessalonians 5:2 (ESV)

◆ June

And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

– 1 Thessalonians 5:14 (ESV)

◆ July

See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

– 1 Thessalonians 5:15 (ESV)

◆ August

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

– 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (ESV)

◆ September

To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of His calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by His power. – 2 Thessalonians 1:11 (ESV)

◆ October

But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

– 2 Thessalonians 2:13 (ESV)

◆ November

But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. – 2 Thessalonians 3:3 (ESV)

◆ December

As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.

– 2 Thessalonians 3:13 (ESV)

FOREWORD

BY SENIOR PASTORS

PREPARING TO MEET KING JESUS

What do times of crisis and uncertainty compel us towards? They compel us to confront our own mortality, scrutinise our foundations and evaluate our purpose. Most of all, they compel us to seek the face of God.

As we sought the Lord, He assured us through these verses:

“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

– Matthew 16:18-19 (ESV)

In these uncertain times, we can be rested in Jesus because He has promised that He Himself will build His Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail. The keys of the Kingdom of God

are the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ – His incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension and second coming. And we are to proclaim it! As the Church, it is our responsibility and privilege to do so. When people believe the Good News, they are able to enter God’s Kingdom.

We are reminded of the charge that the Apostle Paul gave to Timothy as the spiritual leader of the church at Ephesus:

“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in

season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”
– 2 Timothy 4:1-4 (ESV)

Hence, this year’s spiritual burden is “Preparing to Meet King Jesus” — make ready God’s Kingdom people to prepare the world to meet King Jesus in eternity. The world is in darkness and pain. The task is urgent. We believe that we are now in the final hour. We have to prepare ourselves and others to meet King Jesus. This is really what the Church is all about.

How can we prepare ourselves to meet King Jesus?

A People Prepared for His Coming: Be Watchful!

In Luke 1:17, John the Baptist’s calling was to prepare the people for the first coming of our Lord. Like him, we are called to prepare the people for Christ’s second coming. We are to be watchful and persevere in prayer, so as to be ready for the coming of the Lord.

A People Prepared to Stand Firm and Take Action: Be Fruitful!

In times of great distress, those who know their God will stand firm and take action (Dan 11:32). This pandemic is a time of harvest. Many people everywhere are looking for hope. So let us stand firm in our calling as a church

We have to prepare ourselves and others to meet King Jesus. This is really what the Church is all about.

(to be disciples of *A Certain Kind* and return the Church to its disciplemaking roots through Authentic Discipleship and Intentional Disciplemaking) and take action to multiply leaders and disciplemakers for great fruitfulness.

A People Prepared in Personal Holiness: Be Faithful!

1 Thessalonians 4:1-3 remind us to guard our hearts and be faithful, for our own personal sanctification and holiness. Let’s be faithful in our personal integrity and walk with God, aligning our lives back to God in holiness and faithfulness.

This Devotional Journal is designed to help you walk daily with God and experience the transforming power of His Word and Spirit as you reflect, pray and obey the Lord in everything. May you be greatly blessed as you prepare yourselves and many others to meet King Jesus!

In Christ,
Rev Tan Kay Kiong and
Rev Tony Yeo

GUIDE TO USING THIS DEVOTIONAL JOURNAL

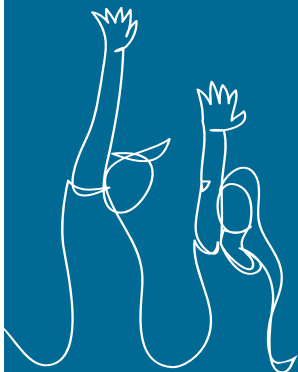
Step 1

PREPARE YOUR HEART IN GOD'S PRESENCE

- ◆ Select a fixed time (preferably in the morning before you begin your day) and a quiet place where you can be alone and undisturbed.
- ◆ Observe a moment of silence as you acknowledge God's presence. Centre down.
- ◆ Begin with a song of worship. Meditate on the lyrics even if you are unfamiliar with the tune. (Refer to the list of worship songs provided.)
- ◆ Ask God to open your heart to hear Him.

NEW IN 2022

You can now type in the PDF copy of the Devotional Journal using your digital device as we have allotted fillable boxes for you to journal your thoughts and prayers without space constraints.



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Examining your life is essential in your faith journey. Your redeemed life as a disciple of Christ deserves careful examining. May you take root and bear fruit in Him!

*The English Standard Version (ESV)
is the default Bible version translation
unless otherwise specified.*

Step 2

ALLOW GOD TO **S.O.A.P.** YOU WITH HIS WORD AND SPIRIT

- ◆ Scripture – Take your time to meditate on the Scripture passage for the day. Pause and mull over words and phrases that stand out to you.
- ◆ Observation – Jot down significant insights and reflections from the passage you have read. You may use the guiding questions provided. The “Deeper Reflection” section is to aid your contemplation of the Scripture. It is not to replace your own observation, for the Holy Spirit illuminates the Scripture to you as you seek Him earnestly.
- ◆ Application – Note down a specific and practical commitment to God's Word for you. Is there a command to obey, a sin to avoid, an example to follow, or a principle to live out? Where appropriate, share your devotional entry with someone.
- ◆ Prayer – Bring your heartfelt response to God in prayer.



PRAYER POINTERS FOR 2022

We have provided prayer pointers for Pastors and Staff every Tuesday and for one of the 3 Faith Exploits (Disciple the Generations, Singapore and the Nations) every Wednesday. Every Thursday, a prayer pointer is included for Outreach/Missions/New Life Leaders. On each Friday, there is a prayer pointer for SGI Leaders (e.g. Zone Mentors, CG Leaders and Assistant CG Leaders). A prayer pointer for Church Board Members is included every Saturday. Please pray for each group as well as any specific individuals whom God may bring to your mind.

PRAY FOR E-MISSIONS

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you; I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”

ISAIAH 41:10 (ESV)

IF YOU COULD USE ONE WORD TO DESCRIBE THE TIMES

we live in, what would it be? A potential candidate might be the word “chaos”. Certainly, as we observe recent events, this is a very real reality in the world. A global pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war, mass shootings in the US, a cryptocurrency crash, high inflation rates, supply chain disruptions and even the ban on live chicken exports from Malaysia! And there will undoubtedly be more mess coming our way as 2022 goes on.

Yet another potential word is “potential”. In times such as these, there is a light that shines through the darkness. There is a way that we are called to walk in despite the uncertainty of the future. As people of God’s Kingdom, we are called to a path of humanity and love, to walk in the Lord’s way of truth and grace, trusting Him to bring forth His goodness out of the chaos. Isaiah 41:10 reminds us that our God is with us. Because we are His people, He will strengthen and uphold us with His righteous right hand.

E-Missions in Covenant EFC aims to love the world through outreach and evangelism through digital means, building Christian digital communities and enabling missions on the ground using digital technology. This involves developing a discipleship-focused, long-form podcast, sending micro-computers as local servers to areas with bad Internet coverage, and digital outreach events with our missions partners.

Give thanks:

- That we are blessed in Singapore with many things.
- That we have many opportunities to love others through giving and serving.
- That God is with us in every circumstance that we are going through.

Pray for:

- Faith to be loving and hopeful in every situation.
- Courage to be the salt and light to the world through our words and deeds.
- God to strengthen and sustain our missionaries in the field.
- The Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest.
- The Gospel of Hope to be heard across the nations of the world.
- The digital space to be leveraged as an effective medium to reach the lost.
- The E-Missions Team to receive wisdom from God to navigate in the rapidly evolving digital space.
- E-Missionaries to love the persons behind the screen.
- Unity among the churches currently working in the digital space.
- More churches to join in to do God’s work in the digital space.

WORSHIP SONGS

JULY - AUGUST

BEFORE YOU I KNEEL

Verse 1

Before You I kneel, my Master and Maker
To offer the work of my hands
For this is the day You've given Your servant
I will rejoice and be glad
For the strength I have to live and breathe
For each skill Your grace has given me
For the needs and opportunities
That will glorify Your great name

Verse 2

Before You I kneel and ask for Your goodness
To cover the work of my hands
For patience and peace to shape all my labor
Your grace for thorns in my path
Flow within me like a living stream
Wear away the stones of pride and greed
'Til Your ways are dwelling deep in me
And a harvest of life is grown

Verse 3

Before You we kneel, our Master and Maker
Establish the work of our hands
And order our steps to seek first Your kingdom
In every small and great task
May we live the Gospel of Your grace
Serve Your purpose in our fleeting days
Then our lives will bring eternal praise
And all glory to Your great name
And all glory to Your great name

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I SPEAK JESUS

Verse 1

I just want to speak the Name of Jesus
Over every heart and every mind
'Cause I know there is peace within Your presence
I speak Jesus

Verse 2

I just want to speak the Name of Jesus
'Til every dark addiction starts to break
Declaring there is hope and there is freedom
I speak Jesus

Chorus

'Cause Your Name is power
Your Name is healing
Your Name is life
Break every stronghold
Shine through the shadows
Burn like a fire

Verse 3

I just want to speak the Name of Jesus
Over fear and all anxiety
To every soul held captive by depression
I speak Jesus

Verse 4

Shout Jesus from the mountains
Jesus in the streets
Jesus in the darkness over every enemy
Jesus for my family
I speak the holy Name
Jesus

Abby Benton | Carlene Prince | Dustin Smith | Jesse Reeves | Kristen Dutton | Raina Pratt
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AT THE CROSS (LOVE RAN RED)

Verse 1

There's a place
Where mercy reigns and never dies
There's a place
Where streams of grace flow deep and wide
Where all the love I've ever found
Comes like a flood comes flowing down

Chorus

At the cross, at the cross
I surrender my life
I'm in awe of You
I'm in awe of You
Where Your love ran red
And my sin washed white
I owe all to You
I owe all to You, Jesus

Verse 2

There's a place
Where sin and shame are powerless
Where my heart
Has peace with God and forgiveness
Where all the love I've ever found
Comes like a flood comes flowing down

Bridge

Here my hope is found
Here on holy ground
Here I bow down
Here I bow down
Here arms open wide
Here You saved my life
Here I bow down
Here I bow (down)

Chris Tomlin | Ed Cash | Jonas Myrin | Matt Armstrong | Matt Redman
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GOD YOU'RE SO GOOD

Verse 1

Amazing love that welcomes me
The kindness of mercy
That bought with blood, wholeheartedly
My soul undeserving

Chorus

God, You're so good
God, You're so good
God, You're so good
You're so good to me

Verse 2

Behold the cross
Age to age
And hour by hour
The dead are raised, the sinner saved
The work of Your power

Bridge

I am blessed, I am called
I am healed, I am whole
I am saved in Jesus' name
Highly favored, anointed
Filled with Your power
For the glory of Jesus' name

Verse 3

And should this life bring suffering
Lord, I will remember
What Calvary has bought for me
Both now and forever

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A THOUSAND HALLELUJAHS

Verse 1

Who else would rocks cry out to worship?
Whose glory taught the stars to shine?
Perhaps creation longs to have the words to sing
But this joy is mine

Chorus

With a thousand hallelujahs
We magnify Your name
You alone deserve the glory
The honour and the praise
Lord Jesus, this song is forever Yours
A thousand hallelujahs
And a thousand more

Verse 2

Who else would die for our redemption?
Whose resurrection means I'll rise?
There isn't time enough to sing of all You've done
But I have eternity to try

Bridge

Praise to the Lord
To the Lamb
To the King of heaven
Praise for He rose
Now He reigns
We will sing forever

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BATTLE BELONGS

Verse 1

When all I see is the battle
You see my victory
When all I see is a mountain
You see a mountain moved
And as I walk through the shadow
Your love surrounds me
There's nothing to fear now
For I am safe with You

Chorus

So when I fight, I'll fight on my knees
With my hands lifted high
O God, the battle belongs to You
And every fear I lay at Your feet
I'll sing through the night
O God, the battle belongs to You

Verse 2

And if You are for me
Who can be against me?
For Jesus, there's nothing impossible for You
When all I see are the ashes
You see the beauty
When all I see is a cross
God, You see the empty tomb

Bridge

(An) Almighty Fortress, You go before us
Nothing can stand against the power of our God
You shine in the shadows
You win every battle
Nothing can stand against the power of our God

Tag

O God, the battle belongs to You

Brian Johnson | Phil Wickham
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10,000 REASONS

Chorus

Bless the Lord, O my soul
 O my soul
 Worship His holy name
 Sing like never before
 O my soul
 I'll worship Your holy name

Verse 1

The sun comes up it's a new day dawning
 It's time to sing Your song again
 Whatever may pass and whatever lies before me
 Let me be singing when the evening comes

Verse 2

You're rich in love and You're slow to anger
 Your name is great and Your heart is kind
 For all Your goodness I will keep on singing
 Ten thousand reasons for my heart to find

Verse 3

And on that day when my strength is failing
 The end draws near and my time has come
 Still my soul will sing Your praise unending
 Ten thousand years and then forevermore

Ending

Worship Your holy name
 Lord, I'll worship Your holy name

Jonas Myrin | Matt Redman

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GOODNESS OF GOD

Verse 1

I love You, Lord
 For Your mercy never fails me
 All my days
 I've been held in Your hands
 From the moment that I wake up
 Until I lay my head
 I will sing of the goodness of God

Chorus

All my life You have been faithful
 All my life You have been so, so good
 With every breath that I am able
 I will sing of the goodness of God

Verse 2

I love Your voice
 You have led me through the fire
 In darkest night
 You are close like no other
 I've known You as a father
 I've known You as a friend
 I have lived in the goodness of God

Bridge

Your goodness is running after
 It's running after me
 Your goodness is running after
 It's running after me
 With my life laid down
 I'm surrendered now
 I give You everything
 Your goodness is running after
 It's running after me

Ben Fielding | Brian Johnson | Ed Cash | Jason Ingram | Jenn Johnson

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SOVEREIGN OVER US

Verse 1

There is strength within the sorrow
There is beauty in our tears
And You meet us in our mourning
With a love that casts out fear

Verse 2

You are working in our waiting
You're sanctifying us
When beyond our understanding
You're teaching us to trust

Chorus

Your plans are still to prosper
You've not forgotten us
You're with us in the fire and the flood
You're faithful forever, perfect in love
You are sovereign over us

Verse 3

You are wisdom unimagined
Who could understand Your ways
Reigning high above the heavens
Reaching down in endless grace

Verse 4

You're the lifter of the lowly
Compassionate and kind
You surround and You uphold me
And Your promises are my delight

Bridge

Even what the enemy means for evil
You turn it for our good
You turn it for our good
And for Your glory

Even in the valley, You are faithful
You're working for our good
You're working for our good
And for Your glory
(Repeat)

Ending

Faithful forever, perfect in love
You are sovereign over us

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MON
01

Growing Abundantly in the Lord

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:1-3

OBSERVATION

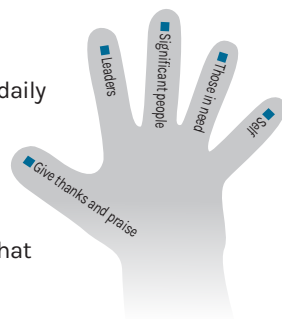
What significant observations can you make about Paul's two thanksgivings to God?

APPLICATION

What can I do to experience abundant growth in the Lord?

PRAYER

I come to You, Bread of Life. Give me this day my daily bread, the living Word of God, to nourish my soul and renew my mind and inner being. I come to You, Lord, to drink from You the living water, that from my innermost being will flow rivers of living water, even the Holy Spirit. I ask for these that I may flourish abundantly in knowing You.



Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for leaders
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

CENTRAL IN A THEOCENTRIC LIFE IS GIVING THANKS TO

God – thanksgiving that is marked by three essential characteristics: “We ought to” – necessity, “always” – constancy and “as is right” – propriety (v.3).¹

Paul gives thanks to God for the Thessalonians, because their “work produced by faith... labour prompted by love...endurance inspired by hope” (v.3, NIV) had grown tremendously over a short period of time – and were still growing: “your faith is growing-abundantly (*huperauxanō*)” and “your love...for one another is increasing (*pleonazō*)” (2 Thess 1:3). The two verbs are emphatic.² *Huperauxanō* “implies an internal, organic growth, as of a tree” and *pleonazō* implies “a diffusive or expansive character, as of a flood irrigating the land”³. But this by no means was the achievement of the Thessalonians. It is God “who gives the growth” (1 Cor 3:6-7). We cannot bear fruit by ourselves, but only when we abide in the Lord and He in us, “for apart from Me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:4-5). Our growth is ultimately the growth of our relationship with God.

Our reflection on our spiritual growth ought to be more than just “Have I been growing?”, but “Am I growing abundantly and flourishing?” We are to be like “the righteous” who “flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon” and “still bear fruit in old age...ever full of sap and green” (Psa 92:12, 14). The key is, we are “planted in the house of the Lord” – and then we “flourish in the courts of our God” (Psa 92:13). “Planted” means being rooted there permanently and growing continually.

¹ Jeffrey A. D. Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Baker Academic, 2014), 450

² John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Thessalonians, The Bible Speaks Today* (IVP, 1991), 143

³ J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on Epistles of Paul* (Macmillan, 1895), 98

TUE
02

A Growing-in-Love Journey

SCRIPTURE 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 2 Thessalonians 1:3

OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about the love of the Thessalonians?

APPLICATION

What are the challenges in my journey of growing in love and how will I face them?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for pastors and staff: To abound in love with knowledge and discernment
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

PAUL HAD BEEN PRAYING FOR THE THESSALONIANS THAT “the Lord [will] make you increase and abound in love for one another” (v.12). And now their love for one another “is increasing” (2 Thess 1:3). God was answering Paul’s prayer. God’s answer to prayer for growth in love is never once and for all. We do not stop praying for growth in love, for growing in love is a long journey.

For 30 years now, I have not once raised my voice at my wife. Ephesians 4:2-3 enables me to do this: “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, being diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” We do have conflicts, but we have not quarrelled.

Once I came across a book entitled, “Raise Your Kids, Not Your Voice.” After my son was born, I began to raise my voice – at my son, not at my wife. I struggled for 15 years to apply “love is patient” (1 Cor 13:4) toward my son. But the breakthrough and turning point came in a very surprising way. One night, my son was very rude to his grandmother. I shouted at him angrily, and did something to him that I had never done before. I slapped him – and it was so hard that his spectacles flew off. Since then, practising “love is patient” toward my son became a reality in me. God works in strange ways. I learned that to be patient toward my son was a growth journey by itself, even though I am patient and gentle toward my wife.

WED
03

Perseverance of Faith and Hope

SCRIPTURE 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4; James 1:2-3

OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about perseverance⁴ in these two texts?

APPLICATION

How have I been growing in faith and perseverance in recent times?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for leaders
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray Singapore: To find hope in Christ and not in the things of the world
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

IN HIS THANKSGIVING TO GOD, PAUL MENTIONS THE

Thessalonians' "faith" and "love" (v.3), but not "hope" as in 1 Thessalonians 1:3. While Paul does not mention "hope" specifically, it is implied in mentioning their "perseverance" (v.4), for their "perseverance" was "perseverance of hope" (1 Thess 1:3). Biblically, hope and faith are interlinked and overlap, as indicated by "your perseverance [of hope] and faith in all your persecutions" (v. 4). The writer of Hebrews defines "faith" as "the assurance of things hoped for" (Heb 11:1). We will "abound in hope" in "believing" in "the God of hope" (Rom 15:13).

It is noteworthy that the setting of the Thessalonians' abundant growth (v.3) was "persecutions" and "afflictions" (v.4). And with "perseverance and faith" they were "enduring (*anekomai*)" the fiery trial. *Anekomai* means "to be patient with, in the sense of enduring possible difficulty"⁵. This "enduring" is a God-empowered discipline of the mind and will to withstand a trial amidst feeling the difficulty in it.

Trials are for "the testing of your faith" which "produces endurance" (Jas 1:3). Enduring is an act and endurance is a quality. So, as we endure day by day, the quality of endurance is developed in us and becomes part of us. And "when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing" (Jas 1:4, NLT) – that is, abundant growth.

We must recognise that "trials of any kind" (Jas 1:2) is a key process by which God brings about abundant growth in us. And our response to trials reveals if we accept or reject this divine process.

⁴ "Steadfastness" or "endurance" in other translations

⁵ Johannes P. Louw & Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains, Second Edition, Volume 1* (UBS, 1988, 1989), 25.171

THU
04

Exploit Faith: Relying on God

SCRIPTURE Hebrews 11:32-35

OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about faith in verses 32 to 35?

APPLICATION

What areas in my life do I need to exercise faith in God and what does that mean to me?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for Outreach/Missions/New Life leaders: To constantly rely on God
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

MOST OF US KNOW THAT HEBREWS 11 IS ABOUT FAITH.

The word “faith” is repeated 24 times in the 40 verses. Hebrews 11 shows three kinds of faith, which can be encapsulated in verse 35: “Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection.”

The first kind of faith is **exploit faith**: “women received back their dead by resurrection.” Exploit faith is faith as expressed in this statement made by the great missionary, William Carey: “Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God.” It is the faith that sees the dead resurrected, that “conquered kingdoms”, that “performed acts of righteousness”, that “shut the mouths of lions,” that “quenched the power of fire”, that “escaped from the edge of the sword” and that “became mighty in war, putting foreign armies to flight” (vv.33-35a).

In our Christianity, we tend to focus on and emphasise exploit faith. Many of us often prefer to have this kind of faith. When it comes to faith, the first thing that comes to our mind is almost always exploit faith. We like to see great things happen to us, even great things brought about by God. Our presupposition is, the greater our faith is, the greater will be the things that we can do and happen to us, which is not necessarily so. When we pray, “Lord, increase our faith” (Lk 17:5), generally, we are seeking for greater exploit faith. There is nothing wrong about that. However, the faith emphasised in Hebrews is the other two kinds of faith.

FRI
05

Endurance Faith: Standing in God

SCRIPTURE Hebrews 11:32-38

OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about faith in verses 35 to 38?

APPLICATION

What does it mean for me to live by faith in a world with unbiblical values?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray SGI leaders: To grow in perseverance and faith
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

THE LIST OF EXAMPLES OF EXPLOIT FAITH IN VERSES 32

to 35a ends with perhaps the greatest exploit of faith: “Women received back their dead by resurrection” (v.35a). Then, the writer of Hebrews continues with “and others...” (v.35a), indicating a difference. This “and others” faith is **endurance faith**.

Endurance faith is exercised in adversities: “and others were tortured, not accepting their release” (v.35b). The expression “not accepting their release” implies that these people of God who were “tortured” were given the opportunity to be released. But they did not accept their release. Why? They were “tortured” for their faithfulness to God. They could be released, but on the condition that they deny their faith in God. But they refused to compromise. They would rather be tortured and endure the affliction and pain until they die, than to deny their God. Indeed, they were “faithful until death” (Rev 2:10).

Endurance faith is exercised in experiencing “mockings and scourgings, yes also, chains and imprisonment”, being “stoned”, “sawn in two” and “put to death with the sword” (vv.36-37a). With endurance faith, the people of God suffered in being forced to go about “in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated...wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground” (vv.37b-38).

Hebrews was written to believers who were tempted to compromise their faith and God’s word to them was: “you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised” (Heb 10:36). So the writer points them to these examples of endurance faith.

SAT
06

Eschatological Faith: Waiting for God

SCRIPTURE Hebrews 11:13-16, 35-40

OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about faith in verses 13 to 16 and 35 to 40?

APPLICATION

What changes do I need to make in my understanding and attitude with regards to faith?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for Church Board: To set their eyes eschatologically on things that are eternal
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

WITH ENDURANCE FAITH, THE PEOPLE OF GOD WERE

“tortured, not accepting their release” in suffering for their faith. And it was “so that they might obtain a better resurrection” (v.35b). Their endurance faith was built on **eschatological faith**. Two kinds of resurrection are mentioned in verse 35: the resurrection of exploit faith and the resurrection of eschatological faith. The latter faith has “a better resurrection” than the former faith, because the resurrection of eschatological faith lasts for eternity, whereas those resurrected through exploit faith will eventually die again.

Eschatological faith is living life with the end in mind: the Second Coming of Christ, the end of history to which God is bringing, when there will be “a new heaven and a new earth” (2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1) and reigning with Christ “forever and ever” (Rev 22:5). Those who live by eschatological faith see themselves as people “of whom the world is not worthy” (v.38). Note that it is not they are not worthy of the world, but the world is not worthy of them. Is this how we see ourselves and the world?

Biblical faith is both “live by faith” (Heb 10:38) and “died in faith” – and “died in faith without receiving the promises” (vv.13, 39). “Without receiving the promises” means God has not fulfilled the promises. But that does not mean that God is not faithful, for these “promises” are to be fulfilled only at Christ’s Second Coming. Thus, eschatological faith lives for “something better” (v.40). The faith of the “died in faith” is endurance faith and eschatological faith.

SUN
07

Sunday Journal

SCRIPTURE

OBSERVATION

APPLICATION

PRAYER

THE PAST WEEK

Review

◆ What was my high point and my low point for the week?

◆ What gave me life and what drained me?

◆ How was the Spirit of God at work?

THE PAST WEEK

Reflect

- ◆ What is one key thing that God said to me this week in light of what has happened?

Respond

- ◆ What is one thing I need to do in light of what God is saying? Commit in prayer.

Family Devotional

Week 1

Love:

Showing others how much they matter to you.

Memory Verse

"This is real love - not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins."
- 1 John 4:10 (NLT)

* Bottom Line

Love God by loving others.*

* Bible Story

Matthew 22:34-40 - L-O-V-E (Greatest Commandment)

* Activity

Think and Share!

Props: A piece of A3-sized paper or equivalent and markers

Draw two columns on the piece of paper to show the two greatest commandments stated in Matthew 22:34-40 (see table below).

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. | Love your neighbour as yourself |
| Example: • Sing praises to God. | Example: • Talk to a lonely friend. |

Ask your family members to list down what they would do to demonstrate what each commandment means to them (be specific). After the activity, get everyone to share what they wrote.

Say, "Not only does Jesus say that loving our God with all our hearts is the greatest commandment, but He also tells us how we can fulfil it in the second commandment. We should love others like how we love ourselves. When we show love and concern to others, even to those who are unkind to us, we are showing our love to God. Through our kind actions, others see God's glory in us."

* Talk About It

- What are some ways you can show love to God?
- What are some practical ways you can show love to others around you?
- When you show love to others, what does that show them about God?

Parents: Share with your family members about an experience in which you helped a person whom you did not like. What were your challenges? How are the verses in Matthew 22:34-40 shown in this experience?

* Prayer

Thank God for His unconditional love for us. Pray for a willing and humble heart that feels for others, even when they are unlikable.

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Adapted by JoshuaWong/CEFC/August2022



BIBLE STORY VIDEO
<https://cefc.ch/22FD08W1>



MON
08

A Theocentric Focus in Suffering

SCRIPTURE 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5

OBSERVATION

How is the righteous judgement of God expressed?

APPLICATION

What does it mean for me to be considered by God as worthy of His Kingdom to suffer for it?

PRAYER

O Lamb of God, You are worthy to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing, because You suffered and were slain in doing Your Father's will.⁶ I thank You for this divine grace, that You consider me worthy of You and Your Kingdom when I follow You faithfully in Your pathway of the cross.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for leaders
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

BIBLICALLY, IT IS A GIVEN, THAT WHEN WE FOLLOW THE Lord faithfully, we will suffer “trials of various kinds” (Jas 1:2). We have to embrace this biblical “given”. We suffer because we are faithful to the Lord and when we suffer we remain faithful to the Lord – “your **steadfastness** and **faith** in all your persecutions and in all the afflictions that you are **enduring**” (v.4). Note the word “**all**”, which indicates the extent of the Thessalonians’ sufferings.

In our suffering, it is easy for us to focus on the pains that we feel, the causes of the sufferings and our struggling to endure. If we are not careful, this can lead to self-absorption and wallowing in self-pity, and we begin to doubt and question God. A theocentric focus in our suffering will prevent us from spiralling down to this unhealthy spiritual condition.

One important theocentric focus in suffering is: **God is righteous**. God is a “God of faithfulness and without injustice, good and upright is He” and “His work is perfect, for all His ways are just” (Deut 32:4). Paul points the Thessalonians to “the righteous judgment of God” in their suffering (v.5a). Our faithful endurance in trials (v.4) is “plain evidence” of God’s “righteous judgment” (v.5a). In other words, we see God’s “righteous judgment” in our faithful endurance. God’s “righteous judgment” is, we are “**considered worthy** of the kingdom of God” – by God Himself (v.5b). “Christ established the pattern of faithfulness in suffering leading to worthiness”:⁷ “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain” (Rev 5:12) for being a “faithful witness” (Rev 1:5).

⁶ Revelation 5:12

⁷ G. K. Beale, 1-2 Thessalonians, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (IVP Academic, 2003), 185

TUE
09

God's Righteous Judgment in Suffering

SCRIPTURE 2 Thessalonians 1:4-7

OBSERVATION

How is the righteous judgment of God expressed according to verses 6 to 7?

APPLICATION

What does it mean for me to live eschatologically in the light of God's righteous judgment?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for pastors and staff: To rest in God's righteousness when undergoing trials
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IS THE THEOLOGICAL

foundation of Paul's affirming and encouraging the Thessalonians for their "steadfastness and faith" in their "persecutions" and "afflictions" (v.4): "the righteous (*dikaios*) judgment of God" (v.5) and "God considers it just (*dikaios*)" (v.6). Everything that Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 1:4-10 is based and built on the righteousness of God.

There is this hard reality – but a biblical reality – in the history of humankind: the wicked flourish and the righteous suffer. And the wicked who flourish tend to be people with great power, who in arrogance dominate and oppress the weak and the righteous. What we see is injustice. And we ask, "Where is God in this?" and "Why doesn't God do something?" The challenge for us is to see the "evidence of the righteous judgment of God" (v.5) in all these. The truth is God is doing something and will go on doing it. And it takes "spiritual discernment and godly perspective" to see this "evidence" in the very situation in which we see nothing but injustice.⁸

The righteous judgment of God is, God will "**repay** with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant **relief** to you who are afflicted" (vv.6-7a). There will be a reversal of fortunes. However, this reversal will happen "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven" (v.7b). And meanwhile, God's faithful people who are suffering for righteousness may cry out, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before You will judge?" (Rev 6:9-10). The divine response is: "Rest a little longer, until..." (Rev 6:11) – in "steadfastness and faith" (v.4).

⁸ John R. W. Stott, 147

WED
10

Christ's First and Second Coming

SCRIPTURE 2 Thessalonians 1:5-8; John 1:14, 45-46

OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about the First Coming and the Second Coming of Christ?

APPLICATION

What does it mean for me to follow Jesus in the light of His First Coming and Second Coming?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for leaders
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for Singapore: To see the church living out the hope in Christ's Second Coming
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST IS NOT UNRELATED TO His First Coming – when “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14). The theological relationship between the two comings of Christ provides an important perspective that is necessary for our discipleship.

At His First Coming, Jesus lived, suffered, died, rose and ascended to heaven. But Jesus' ascension is not the end of salvation history. After the ascension will be the descension: “the Lord Himself will **descend** from heaven” (1 Thess 4:16). And having disappeared into heaven (Acts 1:9), Jesus will reappear: “when the Lord Jesus is **revealed** from heaven” (v.7b).

The Second Coming of Christ will be in glory and power and “public magnificence”⁹, descending from heaven “with His mighty angels in flaming fire” (vv.6-7a). The “flaming fire” is “a regular biblical symbol of the holy, consuming nature of God's presence”¹⁰ (Exo 3:2; 19:18). But in His First Coming, Jesus came in weakness: He “was crucified in weakness” (2 Cor 13:4). And Jesus came in obscurity as “Jesus of Nazareth”. When Philip told Nathanael that “Jesus of Nazareth” is “the Messiah”, his immediate response was “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (Jn 1:45-46). What lies behind Nathanael's skepticism is “not that the town had a bad reputation but that it was considered totally insignificant”¹¹. “Jesus of Nazareth” “reflected the self-abasement of the man from heaven.”¹² The First Coming of Jesus serves as a discipleship pattern for us, as we wait for His return in glory and power. In following Jesus, we walk the path of “Jesus of Nazareth”.

⁹ John R. W. Stott, 148

¹⁰ John R. W. Stott, 148

¹¹ Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1997), 88

¹² D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans, 1991), 160

THU
11

The Eschatological Vengeance of God

SCRIPTURE 2 Thessalonians 1:4-9

OBSERVATION

What are the facts about God's vengeance that Paul states in verses 8 to 9?

APPLICATION

How does the certainty of God's vengeance at Christ's return affect me in my discipleship journey?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for Outreach/Missions/New Life leaders: To anchor in God's vengeance in the world of injustice
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

THE DAY OF THE LORD WILL BE A DAY OF DIVINE VENGEANCE: "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven...**inflicting vengeance**" (v.7b). This divine vengeance is particularly on those who persecute God's people: "to repay with affliction those who afflict you" (v.6). This provides great comfort and strong encouragement to God's faithful people who suffer persecution to endure with "steadfastness and faith" (v.4). God will vindicate them in His righteousness (vv.5, 6).

But this divine vengeance is also on unbelievers in general, "who do not know God" and "do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (v.8). "Do not know God" and "do not obey the gospel" are parallel ideas. It is not "do not know God" out of ignorance, but wilful rejection of the knowledge of God: "they did not see fit to acknowledge God" and the result is "God gave them up to a depraved mind to do what ought not to be done" (Rom 1:28). It is an act of disobedience and rebellion.

The divine vengeance is depicted as "the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might" (v.9). It will be an "unending suffering" – "eternal destruction" – "in the afterlife"¹³. What is most painful and tormenting in this unending suffering? It is being "away from the presence of the Lord" – to be "banned from ever existing in His presence", in "continued existence separate from Christ and lasting forever"¹⁴. This is in contrast to God's redeemed people who "will see His face" "forever and ever" (Rev 22:4-5).

¹³ G. K. Beale, 188

¹⁴ G. K. Beale, 188-89

FRI
12

The Eschatological Glory of God

SCRIPTURE 2 Thessalonians 1:9-10

OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about the glory of God?

APPLICATION

What is it like for me to have God being glorified in my life?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for SGI leaders: To seek and live for the glory of God
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

AT CHRIST'S SECOND COMING, THOSE WHO REJECTED GOD

will be eternally “away from the **glory** of His might” (v.9) as God’s judgment on them. In contrast, for believers, the Lord “comes on that day to be **glorified** in His saints” (v.10). This eschatological glory of the Lord will be manifested in two ways.

In the exaltation of the Lord: On this eschatological manifestation of God’s glory, Paul has Isaiah 2 as the background.¹⁵ The Lord of history and the nations allows human pride to prevail on earth – “filled with silver and gold...filled with horses and chariots” with “no end”, and worshipping “the work of their hands” (Isa 2:7-8). This prevailing human arrogance will not cease until the day of the Lord. It is only “on that day” that “the loftiness of man will be humbled” and “the Lord alone” – no one else and nothing else – “will be exalted” (Isa 2:11, 17). But God’s glory is still present on earth now (Isa 6:3), albeit its overt full manifestation will be “on that day”.

The Lord “comes on that day to be glorified **in His saints**” (v.10) – that is, **in the transformation of our lives**. The Lord being “glorified in” us is similar to “the Father may be glorified in the Son” (Jn 14:13). God’s glory is present in us as He transforms our lives: “being transformed into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Cor 3:18). God is glorified not only by praising Him with our lips, but more so in our lives that reflect His character in all we think and do.

¹⁵ G. K. Beale, 190

SAT
13

Theological Anchors for Discipleship Adversities

SCRIPTURE 2 Thessalonians 1:4-10

OBSERVATION

What is the significance of the passage being filled with references to God?

APPLICATION

What is like for me to regularly make God as the point of reference in my life?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for Church Board: To see and place God as the centre of adversities
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

VERSES 4 TO 10 IS HIGHLY THEOLOGICAL – THAT IS, THE text is filled with references to God. The theological portrait of God here is painted against the backdrop of faithful endurance in suffering (v.4). From it we can derive four theological anchors for discipleship adversities.

Kingship of God: As seen in “considered worthy of the kingdom of God” (v.5). The “kingdom of God” refers to “the kingly rule, the reign, the dominion and the sovereignty of God in the hearts of people”¹⁶. The lordship of Christ in our lives is expressed in our worship to God. In our adversities, we worship God, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). **Righteousness of God:** As shown in “the righteous judgment of God” (v.5). When we anchor in the righteousness of God, we can live with injustice. Our deep conviction is: However things may go wrong in our lives, God is never wrong.

Vengeance of God: As pointed in God “inflicting vengeance” (v.8). God is an “avenging and wrathful” God, who “takes vengeance” on “His enemies” for His people (Nah 1:2). But this God is also “slow to anger” (Nah 1:3). This divine patience means we have to wait patiently for God to act. **Presence of God:** This “presence of the Lord” (v.9) is the future fully revealed presence of God. But God’s presence with us now can sometimes be concealed: “How long will You hide Your face from me?” (Psa 13:1). Yet, we are assured: “I will not fail you or forsake you” (Deut 31:8).

¹⁶ James A. Brooks, *Mark*, The New American Commentary (Broadman, 1991), 47

SUN
14

Sunday Journal

SCRIPTURE

OBSERVATION

APPLICATION

PRAYER

THE PAST WEEK

Review

◆ What was my high point and my low point for the week?

◆ What gave me life and what drained me?

◆ How was the Spirit of God at work?

THE PAST WEEK

Reflect

- ◆ What is one key thing that God said to me this week in light of what has happened?

Respond

- ◆ What is one thing I need to do in light of what God is saying? Commit in prayer.

Family Devotional

Week 2

Love:

Showing others how much they matter to you.

Memory Verse

"This is real love - not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins."
- 1 John 4:10 (NLT)

* Bottom Line

God made us to take care of each other.*

* Bible Story

Genesis 1-2 - I'll Take Care of You (Creation)

* Activity

Diorama Box

Props: An empty box, construction paper, scissors and glue

Get your family to create a diorama box according to the world which God created in Genesis 1-2. Watch this YouTube video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Loj-YoSbfw>) to learn how to design a diorama.

Discuss with your family members about our roles on earth, and how God shows that He cares for the things He created, including Adam and Eve.

Say, "God knew that all creatures on earth would need companions and community. God made this beautiful world and gave humans the job of taking care of it and taking care of each other."

* Talk About It

- What does it mean to take care of each other?
- How do we care for people who are different from us?
- Think of the friends you have. What would life be like if you did not have them?
- What kinds of things does your family do to take care of you?
- How do you know when someone loves you?

Parents: Share with your family members about an experience in which you felt helpless and the people around you took great care of you. How did you feel? How did God answer your prayers? Who did God send to help you?

* Prayer

Thank God for blessing us with families and people who help and listen to us when we are in trouble. Ask God to use us to extend His love to many more around us.

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MON
15

Building Blocks for Spiritual Growth

SCRIPTURE 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

OBSERVATION

What is the significance of Paul ending what he writes in verses 3 to 10 with prayer (vv.11-12)?

APPLICATION

How do I link Christ's Second Coming to prayer in my discipleship journey?

PRAYER

Lord, teach me and help me to always pray and not lose heart, trusting in the God of justice that He will not delay long over those who cry to Him day and night in their sufferings, but will speedily give justice to them. Strengthen me with all power for all endurance and patience, that You may find me still faithful to You at Your glorious return.¹⁷

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for leaders
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

PAUL GIVES THANKS TO GOD FOR THE THESSALONIANS'

phenomenal growth: Their "faith" was "growing abundantly," and their "love" was "increasing" (v.3). What contributed to their growth? We can glean from verses 3 to 12 four building blocks for spiritual growth.

Perseverance: "your steadfastness and faith" (v.4). Perseverance is very basic and essential in discipleship. Consider what Jesus says: "But the one who endures to the end will be saved" (Matt 24:13). Biblically, the context of perseverance is almost always suffering: "the afflictions that you are enduring" (v.4; Rom 5:3; Heb 10:32). To "endure to the end" is to be faithful to God to the end.

The "end" that we are to "endure to" is ultimately the **Parousia**¹⁸ – Christ's Second Coming (vv.6-10). "Blessed is he who keeps waiting and attains to the 1,335 days" – a long time until "the end of the age" (Dan 12:12, 13, NASB), which refers to Christ's Second Coming. Both the Parousia on Christ's part and perseverance on our part go hand in hand together. What keeps us persevering until the Parousia is the **promises** of God. Paul points the Thessalonians to God's promises of His eschatological "righteous judgment" (vv.5-9) and their glorification with Christ (v.10). God's fulfillment of His promises do call for patient waiting on Him. To persevere with God's promises is to be faithful in God's faithfulness.

Paul ends his encouragement to the Thessalonians for their perseverance (v.4) until the Parousia (vv.5-10) with **prayer** (vv.11-12). This connection shows that Paul's prayer is eschatological in orientation. He prays for the present in the light of the future.

¹⁷ Luke 18:1, 7-8; Colossians 1:11

¹⁸ The word *parousia*, which means "coming", is a technical term for Christ's Second Coming.

TUE
16

Our Primary Concern in Suffering

SCRIPTURE 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

OBSERVATION

What is Paul's concern for the Thessalonians in his praying for them?

APPLICATION

What should be my primary concern in my prayer to God?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for pastors and staff: To keep spiritual maturing as their primary concern in life and ministry
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

WHAT DO WE ASK GOD FOR IN PRAYER WHEN WE ARE

undergoing suffering? For many of us, what immediately comes to our mind is that God will deliver us from the suffering. It is not wrong, except that, that tends to be our primary concern.

In Acts 12, when Peter “was kept in prison”, the church prayed fervently to God for him (Acts 12:5). God answered their prayer almost immediately: “On the very night when Herod...” (Acts 12:6). When God had already answered their prayer (Acts 12:6-11), the church was still “praying” for Peter (Acts 12:12). And it is very strange that when Rhoda reported that Peter was at the door, the church’s response was “You are out of your mind!” (Acts 12:13-15a); and when Rhoda “kept insisting” that it was Peter, the church “kept saying” that it was not (Acts 12:15b). This strange response of the church shows that whatever they were praying for Peter, one thing for sure was, they were “not anticipating an escape”¹⁹. The backdrop to the church praying for Peter was James being killed by Herod (Acts 12:2). So, the prayer of the church “must be for God’s protection and strength in some other way, either in a positive verdict or in some type of lesser punishment”²⁰.

Paul’s primary concern for the suffering Thessalonians in his prayer was their relationship with God and the growth of their faith in action (v.11). We need to discern God’s agenda and purpose in our prayer. In Acts 12, God’s agenda for Peter was deliverance, but for James, it was death.

¹⁹ Darrell L. Bock, Acts, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Baker, 2007), 426

²⁰ Darrell L. Bock, 426

WED
17

Our Worthiness Comes from God

SCRIPTURE 2 Thessalonians 1:4-12

OBSERVATION

What is the connection between verse 5 and verse 11?

APPLICATION

What does it mean for me that God considers and makes me worthy of Him and His calling?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for leaders
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for Singapore: To see the worthiness of the Lord Jesus in the church
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

WHEN WE IN FAITHFULNESS TO GOD ENDURE SUFFERING

with “steadfastness and faith” (v.4), God in His “righteous judgment” will consider us worthy of His Kingdom (v.5), and He will vindicate us by judging the enemies of God (vv.6-9) and Christ glorifying Himself in us at His Second Coming (v.10). And Paul responds to this glorious ultimate reality with prayer – “To this end we always pray for you” (v.11).

In the light of “you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God” (v.5), Paul prays “that our God may make you worthy of His calling” (v.11a). The former is the purpose of God and the latter is prayer to God for the fulfilment of the divine purpose. This is about our worthiness – the worthiness before God that comes from God. This worthiness from God is “the biblical version of how Christians are to have a good ‘self-image’”²¹. Our worthiness is our significance. There is nothing in us or anything that we can do to attain this worthiness. It is purely a gift of God’s grace to us. We have worthiness because God considers us worthy and makes us worthy of Him and His calling for us. Our worthiness from God enables us to live by this theological perspective: “the world is not worthy” of us (Heb 11:38).

There is the human part in our worthiness from God: “Walk in a manner worthy of God” (1 Thess 2:12; Eph 4:1). For this, we pray to “be filled with the knowledge of His will in all Spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Col 1:9-10).

²¹ G. K. Beale, 194

THU
18

Divine Empowerment and Divine Fulfilment

SCRIPTURE 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

OBSERVATION

What is your understanding of Paul's requests in his prayer in verse 11?

APPLICATION

In what specific ways do I see God, by His power, fulfilling His purposes in my life?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for Outreach/Missions/New Life leaders: That God's purpose will be fulfilled in their lives
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE THESSALONIANS CONSISTS OF two petitions: "God may make you worthy...may fulfil..." (v.11). But the two petitions are not unrelated. The latter petition builds on the former.

Paul prays for the **divine fulfilment** of "every purpose/desire (*eudokia*) for goodness" (v.11b) in the Thessalonians' lives. The "purpose" can be divine or human. *Eudokia* "while at times applied to human intentions, is a near-technical term for divine will or plan, synonymous with God's 'counsel,' 'will' and 'purpose'"²² – "the good works that God desires to accomplish in accordance with His purpose"²³. Tom Wright translates the verse as: "God...may complete every plan He has to do you good."²⁴ But in the context, the "purpose" seems to be human: "every good purpose of yours" (v.11, NIV 1984). Nevertheless, theologically, the "purpose" is both divine and human. Our "good purpose" is never humanly defined and created, but formed by and conformed to the purpose and will of God as revealed in His Word. It is similar to the "good works, which **God prepared beforehand**, that **we should walk** in them" (Eph 2:10), and we "work out" our salvation as "God works in" us (Phil 2:12-13). Paul also prays for the divine fulfilment of "every work of faith" – the Christian life in action and authenticity – of the Thessalonians.

The divine fulfilment of our purpose for goodness and our faith in action is by divine empowerment – "by His power" (v.11). Every of our spiritual development and accomplishment by devotion, discipline and diligence is God's gift. It is always divine empowerment and divine fulfilment.

²² Gary S. Shogren, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Zondervan, 2012), 258

²³ Gary S. Shogren, 258

²⁴ Tom Wright, *The New Testament for Everyone* (SPCK, 2011), 458

FRI
19

What's Our Goal in Prayer?

SCRIPTURE 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12; Philippians 1:9-11

OBSERVATION

What is Paul's goal in praying for the Thessalonians?

APPLICATION

What does it mean for me that the goal of my prayer is the glory of God?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for SGI leaders: To have God's glory as the goal in their prayer
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

WHEN WE PRAY, WHAT IS OUR GOAL? THAT GOD ANSWERS

our prayer and meets our needs? Jesus assures us, "Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him" (Matt 6:8). Our emphasis in prayer tends to be on asking God. The starting point of prayer is not us asking God, but God answering us. Jesus give us this great assurance: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matt 7:7-8). God invites us to ask because He desires and wants to give. It is pointless and useless to ask God when He does not answer. We ask God because God will answer.

Our goal in prayer is to be something more than just God answering our prayer. It is that **God is glorified**. In praying for the Thessalonians, Paul says, "To this end we always pray for you...so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be **glorified** in you" (v.12). The words "so that" indicates purpose. Jesus gives us this promise: "Whatever you ask in My name, I will do it" (Jn 14:13a). But He does not stop there. Jesus will answer our prayer "so that the Father may be **glorified** in the Son" (Jn 14:13b). God is glorified in His answer to our prayer.

In answering our prayer, God "gives" only "what is good" (Matt 7:11). God's answer can be "Yes", "No" or "Wait". Each of these answers of God is "what is good" for us. And in each of these answers is the glory of God. Can we see that?

SAT
20

The Lord Glorified in Us

SCRIPTURE 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5, 10-12

OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about the glory of God?

APPLICATION

How do I see the glory of God manifested in my life?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for Church Board: To see the glory of God in their lives
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

THE GOAL OF PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE THESSALONIANS

is “the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him” (v.12) – in line with “when He comes to be glorified in His saints” (v.10). The context of Paul’s prayer was the Thessalonians’ faithful endurance of suffering anchored in the hope of Christ’s Second Coming in glory (2 Thess 1:4-10).

Scripture often links suffering with glory. As for suffering, it is not suffering per se, but faithful endurance of suffering. And the glory is the Lord glorified in us and us glorified in Him (v.12). Jesus’s suffering and death on the cross is the glory of God (Jn 13:31-32). In rejoicing in “hope of the glory of God”, we are to “glory in our sufferings” (Rom 5:2b-3, NIV). We “share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory” (Rom 8:17, NIV). In suffering, “the Spirit of glory and of God rests on” us (1 Pet 4:14). It is vital then, that we learn to see the glory of God in our faithful endurance of suffering.

It is the “name” of Christ that is glorified in us (v.12). In biblical times, the “name” of a person “often became a symbol of all that person was, his or her qualities and power, and revealed that person’s fundamental character”²⁵. The glorification of Christ in us is Christ’s manifestation of who He is in us. The Lord is glorified in us when He imparted to us His character to endure in faith our suffering.²⁶ This is biblical discipleship.

²⁵ Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Apollos, 2002), 299

²⁶ G. K. Beale, 197

SUN
21

Sunday Journal

SCRIPTURE

OBSERVATION

APPLICATION

PRAYER

THE PAST WEEK

Review

◆ What was my high point and my low point for the week?

◆ What gave me life and what drained me?

◆ How was the Spirit of God at work?

THE PAST WEEK

Reflect

- ◆ What is one key thing that God said to me this week in light of what has happened?

Respond

- ◆ What is one thing I need to do in light of what God is saying? Commit in prayer.

Family Devotional

Week 3

Love:

Showing others how much they matter to you.

Memory Verse

"This is real love - not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins."
- 1 John 4:10 (NLT)

* Bottom Line

God loves us no matter what.*

* Bible Story

Genesis 3 - No Matter What (The Fall)

* Activity

Mistakes

Props: Markers, drawing board paper and some paint

Ask your family members to each drop a different coloured blot of paint on the paper and let it dry. Then get everyone to use markers to create a picture by drawing around the blots of paint.

After the activity, have your family share about the picture they created. Discuss how this "mess" can become a beautiful creation.

Say, "Adam and Eve knew they failed God. They chose to hide from God. We know we can hide nothing from God. Even though God was saddened by their mistakes, He gave them clothes made from animal skin. If we think that our God will quit loving us because we make mistakes, then we are wrong. God loves us no matter what. He will continue to guide and bring us back to Him."

* Talk About It

- How did you feel when you made mistakes?
- Did you ever feel like God doesn't love you?
- What are some things that remind you that God loves you no matter what?
- What can you do to make things right?

Parents: Share with your family members about a big mistake you made in the past and how God turned it around. How did God show his love to you? How did this event change the way you think and behave?

* Prayer

Ask for God's forgiveness for the sins we committed. Pray for wisdom and the ability to listen to Him in both good and challenging times.

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Adapted by JoshuaWong/CEFC/August2022

BIBLE STORY VIDEO
<https://cefc.ch/22FD08W3>



MON
22

God's Gift of Life

SCRIPTURE John 10:7-10; Psalm 27:4

OBSERVATION

What does it mean to “have [life] abundantly” (v.10)?

APPLICATION

What must I do to live well and not waste this one life that God has given me?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your Son Jesus Christ into the world to give His life in order to save sinners so that they may have life abundantly. I am one whom You have given eternal life – never-ending life in relationship with You. Please help me by the empowering of Your Spirit to live this present life in faithful stewardship and self-giving service for Your Kingdom and glory. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for leaders
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

LIFE IS A GIFT FROM GOD. JESUS CAME TO GIVE HIS PEOPLE

life abundantly (v.10). It is life that is superior in quality, because it is lived in relationship with Jesus.²⁷ We must responsibly steward this one life that we have received from God. In his one life, the Psalmist sought the one thing that was most valuable to him: “One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life...” (Psa 27:4). The Psalmist wanted above all to be in the presence of God. **Our greatest treasure is the gift of life in Christ.** How can we live well and not waste our life? Many people seek worldly treasures, educational attainments, career achievements, family happiness, children’s accomplishments, personal wealth and pleasures. These things can be legitimate pursuits, but they will never fully satisfy us. What ultimately satisfies our souls and meets our deepest needs is our relationship with God. Flowing from that vital and most important relationship, we should then lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven (Matt 6:19-20) by seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt 6:33). One way to do that is to step up to serve in church ministry. This involves giving ourselves – our time and energy – in self-giving service to others in order to build up God’s Church for God’s glory. In this way we will steward well this most precious gift from God and not waste our life. “Only one life, t’will soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last.”²⁸

²⁷ Such a life is “more than one would normally expect or anticipate” (per NET Bible Notes), or “rich and satisfying” (per NLT), or “real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of” (per MSG).
²⁸ From a poem by Charles Thomas Studd: www.cavaliersonly.com/poetry_by_christian_poets_of_the_past/only_one_life_twill_soon_be_past_-_poem_by_ct_studd

TUE
23

Godly Perspective on Life

SCRIPTURE Philippians 1:21-26; Ephesians 4:11-16

OBSERVATION

What was the Apostle Paul's perspective on life?

APPLICATION

How does "to live is Christ" look like for me in practical day-to-day living?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for pastors and staff: To live for Christ and work hard to equip the church for ministry
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

PAUL'S MEMORABLE STATEMENT REFLECTED HIS MINDSET

as a slave²⁹ of Jesus Christ: "For to me **to live is Christ**, and to die is gain" (v.21). What a Christ-centred perspective on life! Paul's life was all about Christ. To live was to work hard to advance the cause of Christ ("fruitful labour", v.22). Although Paul's desire was to depart and be with the Lord (v.23), he was prepared to live on and continue to serve the church for their spiritual growth (vv.24-25). Paul was determined **to live for Christ**. In practical terms, serving the Lord means using our spiritual gifts and giving our time, energy and money, to serve His Church by bringing in, building up and sending out God's people. Brothers and sisters, we are to faithfully serve the Lord as long as we have the health, strength and ability to do so. In the journey of discipleship, nothing surpasses the value of knowing Christ; there is to be no looking back nor holding back (Phil 3:7-8, 13-14). We are **to do all things for the sake of Christ**.

Each member of the Church, that is, the body of Christ, has a part to play, a vital contribution to make, in building up the body in faith, knowledge, wisdom, maturity, unity, harmony and love (Eph 4:11-16). Therefore, in the local church, no member is without a role or function. No one should be disconnected and disengaged from the life of the church. Are you connected to a small group community?³⁰ Are you engaged in serving in a ministry?³¹ If you are not, it is time to step up.

²⁹ Translated from the Greek word *doulos* (see Phil 1:1), which can also be translated as "servant".

³⁰ To get connected to a community, visit <https://www.cefc.org.sg/get-connected/>

³¹ To get involved in a ministry, visit <https://www.cefc.org.sg/multiply/#getting-involved>

WED
24

Our Choices in Life

SCRIPTURE Daniel 3:1-18

OBSERVATION

What choices confronted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and why?

APPLICATION

In what way(s) do I currently face pressure to compromise my faith in and allegiance to God?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for leaders
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for Singapore: That Christians in Singapore will not compromise their faith in and allegiance to God, even when they face threats and temptations
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

WHO DO YOU SERVE? “GOD.” UNWAVERINGLY AND FAITHFULLY?

“Yes.” Even if it will cost you your life? “I...er...um...” Unlike this imagined dialogue, there was no hesitation on the part of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Confronted with a choice of who they would serve and worship, the three young men resolutely maintained that they would serve and worship only their God – Yahweh, the God of heaven³² – even though that would mean being thrown into a burning fiery furnace resulting in certain death. Even if God did not deliver them from the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar, they would not serve his gods or worship the golden statue that he had set up (vv.16-18). Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego would rather die than turn away from Yahweh to serve and worship false gods.

Whenever we serve in Christian ministry, we should remember that we are serving God. To serve God is to worship Him. We are to worship God and Him alone. But along the way, we will face temptations to serve false gods like the idols of money, sensuality, power and fame. If we give in to those temptations, we will stop serving God. The enemy may even threaten to harm us when we seek to start or continue serving in Christian ministry. We must be sober-minded and watchful against the devil’s attacks (1 Pet 5:8). We must submit ourselves to God and resist the devil (Jas 4:7; 1 Pet 5:9). God Himself will restore, confirm, strengthen and establish us (1 Pet 5:10). The starting point is to resolve today to put away all false gods and serve the Lord (Josh 24:14-15).

³² Cf. Genesis 24:3, 7; Daniel 2:18, 19, 37, 44.

THU
25

Serve with a Heart of Faithfulness

SCRIPTURE 1 Samuel 1

OBSERVATION

In what ways was Hannah faithful to God in her journey of seeking joy and fulfillment in life?

APPLICATION

How can I serve God with a heart of faithfulness despite disappointments, setbacks or failures in life?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for Outreach/Missions/New Life leaders: To serve God with a heart of faithfulness, bringing their burdens before God and honouring their commitments to God
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

SOMETIMES WE FIND IT DIFFICULT TO SERVE THE LORD

with a heart of faithfulness. When we experience disappointments, setbacks or failures in life, we may feel disappointed with God for not answering our prayers. We may end up serving God half-heartedly, or even stop serving Him altogether. When God closed Hannah's womb and she could not bear a child even after years of trying, her rival regularly taunted her with cutting words (vv.5-7). In her sadness, Hannah wept and refused to eat (vv.7-8). Yet she did not stop worshipping and serving God. Year after year, she faithfully made the journey with her husband Elkanah from Ephraim to Shiloh to sacrifice to the Lord. Hannah **brought her burdens before God** in prayer with deep distress and bitter tears (v.10). She poured out her soul before the Lord – a testament to her faith in and dependence on God despite her troubled spirit, great anxiety and vexation (vv.15, 16). We too can bring our burdens and anxieties before God in prayer expressed with genuine emotions. The Lord understands how we feel and He has promised to sustain us and lift us up, because He cares for us.³³

After the Lord granted Hannah's request and gave her a son (vv.19-20), Hannah **honoured her commitments to God** and promptly fulfilled her vow to give her young child Samuel to the Lord for a lifetime of priestly service (vv.21-28). Let us learn to keep faith with God even through the trials of life. Let us faithfully serve the Lord as we trust in Him to answer our prayers in His perfect ways and timing.

³³ Psalm 55:22; 1 Peter 5:7.

FRI
26

Serve with a Heart of Attentiveness

SCRIPTURE 1 Samuel 3:1-10, 19-21

OBSERVATION

How did Samuel grow in hearing and serving God?

APPLICATION

How can I learn to better hear God and serve Him?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for SGI leaders: To grow in discerning God's voice and doing God's will
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

FROM A YOUNG AGE, SAMUEL LEARNT TO BE ATTENTIVE

to the voice of God and the Word of God (vv.1-10). After initial guidance by Eli the priest, Samuel grew through walking with God and becoming familiar with His presence (vv.19-20). Over time, God spoke to Samuel and to the people of Israel through him, and God established Samuel's ministry.

Learning to discern God's voice is a process. Initially, like Samuel, we may not realise that the Lord is speaking to us. We may miss hearing God calling us to service, or revealing insights to situations around us, or guiding us in particular actions to take. So long as we learn from our mistakes, God will give us further opportunities. We learn by making continual efforts to put ourselves in a position of attentiveness to hear from God through His Word and by His Spirit. The words "**Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears**" (v.9) are not a prayer formula, but rather reflect **the posture of a heart of attentiveness**. This presupposes that the worshipper **wants to hear from God, is submitted to His will and committed to act upon what He would say**. A person who is prayerful with an attentive heart to God will certainly hear from Him and, very importantly, obey what He says. All of us are on a journey – some people are ahead of us with more experience of hearing and serving the Lord, others are behind us. Let us help one another and all grow in discerning God's voice and doing God's will. **Whatever the Lord says to us, we will do.**

SAT
27Serve with
a Heart of Wisdom

SCRIPTURE Psalm 90

OBSERVATION

What are the petitions made by the Psalmist to God?

APPLICATION

How can I serve God with a heart of wisdom?

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for Church Board: To number their days, seek God's presence and prayerfully depend on God to establish the work of their hands
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

HOW CAN WE SERVE GOD WITH A HEART OF WISDOM?

The Psalmist teaches us at least three ways: (1) **Number our days** (v.12). Live an examined life. Set aside a quarterly day of prayer to pause and take stock of your life. Reflect often on your mortality and the brevity of life. Our days are fleeting. Have you been living righteously in the fear of the Lord? What have you been doing with your time? Have you been making the most of your opportunities to serve God?

(2) **Seek God's presence** ("Return, O LORD!", v.13). God is our ultimate source of satisfaction, joy and gladness. Communing with Him, our soul is deeply satisfied. Experiencing His steadfast love and hearing Him speak His reassuring promises to us, our heart is filled with joy and gladness, notwithstanding the journey of pain and suffering that we sometimes must go through. Afflictions are often necessary to humble, refine and mould us. They cause us to put our hope in God.

(3) **Depend on God to establish the work of our hands** (vv.16-17). If we immerse ourselves in work without reference to and dependence on God, success will elude us. However, when we prayerfully work, God directs and guides us with His wisdom. He gives power and favour. He opens doors and supplies resources. He makes possible what seems impossible. Success is not doing what the world tells us to do. Success is not building our own kingdom, but God's Kingdom. True success is doing what God wants us to do, in His way, according to His timing and for His glory.

SUN
28

Sunday Journal

SCRIPTURE

OBSERVATION

APPLICATION

PRAYER

THE PAST WEEK

Review

◆ What was my high point and my low point for the week?

◆ What gave me life and what drained me?

◆ How was the Spirit of God at work?

THE PAST WEEK

Reflect

- ◆ What is one key thing that God said to me this week in light of what has happened?

Respond

- ◆ What is one thing I need to do in light of what God is saying? Commit in prayer.

Family Devotional

Week 4

Love:

Showing others how much they matter to you.

Memory Verse

"This is real love - not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins."
- 1 John 4:10 (NLT)

* Bottom Line

God has a plan to show love to the world.*

* Bible Story

Genesis 12:1-9, 15:1-6 - I Choose You (God Chooses Abram)

* Activity

Marble Maze

Props: Marbles, straws, Lego® Bricks and a Lego® base

Ask your family members to create a simple maze using all the materials. Place a marble in the middle of the maze. Get everyone to take turns holding the base of the maze and tilting it in different directions to guide the marble towards the exit.

After the activity, get everyone to share:

- What does the maze tell us about God's plan for us?
- What happens when we fail to follow the path?

Say, "God asked Abram to move his family to the Promised Land. God promised Abram that his offspring would be as many as the stars in the sky. His plan and promises do not change. We are the chosen ones to be part of His plan to show His love to the world. Sometimes we may miss the steps, just like the marble in the maze. God guides and gets us back on track."

* Talk About It

- When have you had to make a plan?
- How do you usually react when your plans have to change?
- Since we typically do not hear God's audible voice, how can we know what God's plan is for us?
- Can God still use us to show love to the world, even if we have fallen off the path a bit?

Parents: Share with your family members about a plan you made that went wrong. What did you do to get back on track? What did you learn about following or not following God's plan?

* Prayer

Pray for a willing heart to follow His plan no matter what, just like Abraham.

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MON
29

Do You Not Perceive It?

SCRIPTURE Isaiah 43:16-19

OBSERVATION

What did God tell the Israelites to forget? What did He ask them to do at that present time?

APPLICATION

Reflect on what were some things that happened to you and your family over the past two pandemic years. What might the Lord be saying to you through these things?

PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for doing “new” things for Your Church and Your children in the pandemic season. Holy Spirit, please help me to be aware of what You might be saying to me and my community through these events. Lord Jesus, please grant me the courage to trust and love You more in the season ahead. For I ask this in Your name. Amen.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for leaders
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

VERSES 16 TO 17 GIVE A DESCRIPTION OF GOD’S MIGHTY

deliverance in the Exodus. Pharaoh’s army was literally destroyed in the sea, “extinguished, quenched like a wick” (v.17; cf. Exo 14:28). In stark contrast, God brought His children through the impossible obstacle of the Red Sea (Exo 14:29). For the Jews, this salvation event was the mighty saving event of all events! Yet the Lord told the Israelites in Isaiah’s time to forget this (v.18). Why? Because what God was about to do, that is, bring the Israelites back from exile in Babylon and reform the nation of Israel, would be an even more astounding miracle! And it came to pass as He promised! Sometimes we may be so caught up in how things were done in the past that we lose sight of what God might be doing in the present.

Verse 19 was an anchor word the Lord gave to our church over the past two pandemic years. He was saying that He was likewise doing something new in us amid the plague. This week as we celebrate Covenant’s 44th Anniversary – and as we exit the pandemic into endemicity – it is right and necessary to take some time to review what has happened over the past two years. Therefore, we will do just that for the first three days of this week, that is, Monday to Wednesday. Then from Thursday to Saturday, we will look at what we believe the Lord is directing us towards in the season ahead. So let us prayerfully begin this period of reflection and seek to perceive what God is doing.

TUE
30

Do You Love Me?

SCRIPTURE Matthew 22:34-38; John 21:15-19

OBSERVATION

What is the common theme in the two passages? What is really important to God?

APPLICATION

Reflect on how the events of the past two years might have revealed your love (or perhaps the lack of it) for the Lord Jesus. Then respond to Him in prayer.

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for pastors and staff: A fresh outpouring of God's love over the full-time church staff and their families, and that they will grow to love the Lord with their whole being
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for those in need
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT THE GREATEST commandment is mentioned in all three of the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark³⁴ and Luke³⁵), but is absent from John's account of the Gospel. One wonders why the Apostle John chose not to include it in his account. Yet the theme of loving God totally is surely not missing from John's account. As a matter of fact, John ends his Gospel with the restoration of the Lord's call upon the Apostle Peter's life in chapter 21. It reveals Jesus' **gracious** love that does not depend on how well we "perform". More importantly, we see that Jesus' primary focus was not whether Peter could **do** anything for Him (hence, Jesus does not start by asking Peter to do something for Him). Rather Jesus' first concern – and therefore repeated question to Peter – was simply this **one** thing: "**Do you love Me?**" (Jn 21:15-17). In other words, amid our failures, God's primary concern is not what we might be doing for Him in the future (important as that may be), but at the heart of it all, **do we really love Him?**

We are on Day Two of trying to "perceive" what the Lord may have been revealing to us in the course of the past two pandemic years. Certainly, we believe that He has spoken in different ways to different ones. Yet today we see that His primary concern was: **How has the pandemic revealed the quality of your love for Him?**

³⁴ Mark 12:28-30.

³⁵ Luke 10:25-27.

WED
31

How Do I Know That I Am Loving God?

SCRIPTURE Matthew 22:39-40; 1 John 4:20-21

OBSERVATION

What is the common theme in the two passages?

APPLICATION

Reflect on how the **quality** of your relationships with those closest to you (e.g., family members and friends) has been affected over the last two years. Ask God to help you love them (and others) better through both words and deeds.

PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

Prayer Pointers

- ◆ Give thanks and praise
- ◆ Pray for leaders
- ◆ Pray for significant people
- ◆ Pray for Singapore: That Christians in Singapore will love one another in such a way that those outside the Church will see the reality of God
- ◆ Pray for self

DEEPER REFLECTION

JESUS COULD WELL HAVE STOPPED HIS ANSWER AT verse 38 when asked which was the great commandment. Yet the Lord chose, in His next breath, to enjoin it with a second commandment – **“You shall love your neighbour as yourself”** (v.39). Why did Jesus proceed to state the second commandment and join it together with the first, as it were, like Siamese twins? “On these **two** commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (v.40).

Truth be told, it is not easy to love God whom we cannot see. So how do we know whether we are really loving God? Jesus and John show us how we can ascertain this. Somehow, the way we love God (who is invisible) is reflected in the way we love people (who are visible). In other words, **the quality of our relationships with other people reflects the quality of our relationship with God.** How do you know whether you love God? By examining the quality of your relationships with other people to see whether you really love them, that is, love them as you love yourself.

This is the final day of trying to “perceive” what the Lord might have been revealing to us over these past two pandemic years. If it is true (and we believe so) that how we relate with other people reveals the quality of our love for God, then it is necessary for us to examine how we have been relating to our family, friends, CG mates, colleagues, next-door neighbours and the foreigners in our land. Let us seek to grow in our love for God and people.

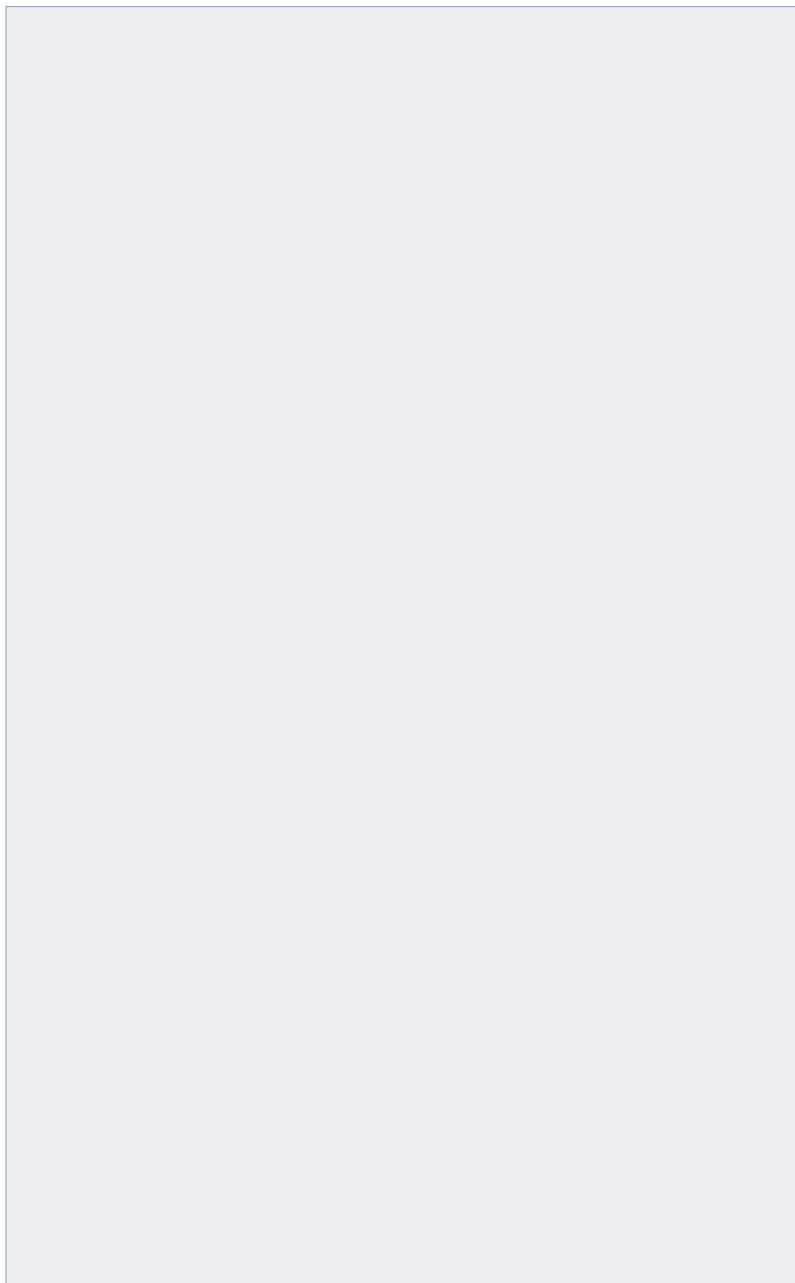
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